

**RESOURCE SHEET 3-F****Program Observation**

WHAT IS AN OBSERVATION AND WHEN IS IT USED?

Observations are a way to collect information by watching participants or activities in action. Observations allow you to view and document the content of an activity, and interactions among participants and processes, such as decision-making, meetings, etc. Observations can be conducted periodically throughout the program to measure change over time. Observations can be more multi-dimensional than other data collection activities because they can document interactions between participants, individual's behaviors, activity content and the setting. While the benefits of observations are multifold, the presence of the observer may influence the behavior of those being observed. The type of data collected can also vary if more than one observer is gathering data.

Guidelines for Observing Events

- *Identify purpose of observation.* Determine the focus of the observation, including who will be observed, what will be observed and the duration of the observation. For example, an observation of a racism workshop could include documentation of number of youth present, which youth participated, and how they participated, and the methods the facilitator used to solicit equal participation.
- *Design observation guide.* Once you identify the purpose of the observation, the observation guide should be developed to address key observation questions/goals. These goals can include interactions between individuals or groups of people, activities, and topics discussed.
- *Train Observers.* Determine what types of documentation is appropriate for each component of the observation form. If possible, have all observers observe the same setting and fill out their forms separately, then compare their responses and discuss and differences in level of detail and content that were noted. This will help create a common understanding of what level and type of information should be collected.



What to Observe

- *The setting:* What is the physical environment like? What kinds of behavior does the setting encourage, permit, discourage, or prevent?
- *The participants:* Who is in the scene, how many people, and what are their roles. What brings these people together? Who is allowed there?
- *Activities and interactions:* What is going on? Is there a definable sequence of activities? How do people interact with the activity and one another?
- *Frequency and duration:* When did the activity begin? How long does it last? Is the activity recurring or unique? How typical of such situations is the one being observed?



SAMPLE OBSERVATION FORM

Name of observer _____

Date _____

Event _____

Location _____

Number of youth present _____

Number of staff present _____

Names of staff present:

Take note of the following general dimensions.

General Dimensions	Yes	No	Comments/Details
Do youth lead the activity?			
Does the session structure allow for broad group input?			
Is the space comfortable and well lit?			
Do youth feel comfortable in the space?			
Are the walls or space decorated in any way?			
Information is presented in a variety of modes (visual, oral, discussion-based)			

YOUTH/ADULT INTERACTION

Please check one box for the following qualities of youth adult interaction:

Qualities of interaction	Yes	No	Uneven	Comments
Guidelines or ground rules are set at the beginning of activity				
Youth ask questions				
Staff or adults avoid the use of jargon or technical terms - stop to explain when youth don't understand				



Qualities of interaction	Yes	No	Uneven	Comments
Youth share from their own experience				
Staff and or adults share from their own experiences				
All youth participate in discussion				
Adults and youth appear to respect each other's opinions and perspectives				
Efforts are made to equalize input—i.e. Adults or other youth solicit the participation of quiet youth and/or adults				
Youth's body language seems engaged and energized				
Participation crossed racial, cultural and gender boundaries				

Describe an interesting comment or exchange that occurred during the observation:

How would you describe the climate of the activity? (informal, structured, friendly, etc)

Other comments: